

**BOISE DISTRICT (BD) BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)**

Boise District Offices

Boise, Idaho

March 22, 2006

Minutes

Council Members Present: Robert Amidon, Gilbert Green, Margaret Soulen-Hinson, Donna Bennett, Ted Howard, Brenda Richards, Richard Raymondi, Nate Helm, Patric Cudmore, John Robison, Robert Baker, Dale Dixon, Grant Simonds.

Council Members Absent: Chris Salove, Neil Rimbey.

BLM Advisory Present: Jerry Taylor, BD District Manager; MJ Byrne, BD RAC Coordinator.

Other BLM Staff Present: Ron Kay, Owyhee Field Office Manager; Mitch Jaurena, Bruneau Field Office Manager; Rosemary Thomas, Four Rivers Field Office Manager; Mike O'Donnell, Planning & Environmental Coordinator; John Augsburger, Wildlife Biologist; Frank Jenks, Outdoor Recreation Planner.

Other: Becky Desmond, Note taker, Steve Goddard, RAC Sage Grouse Subcommittee Member.

Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated. Also, for new members' information, the note taker does not provide detailed notes for which the presenter has provided a handout. Titles of handouts and other items included in the meeting notebook are listed in the appendix following the minutes.

COUNCIL BUSINESS, GENERAL INFORMATION, AND OPENING

REMARKS: Gilbert Green, acting chairman, brought the meeting to order. He commented that it was good news for Idaho that Governor Kempthorne has been nominated by President Bush to replace Gail Norton as head of the Department of the Interior. Jerry Taylor said that Bud Ripley from the Washington BLM Office is coming to serve as the Acting State Director following the resignation of K Lynn Bennett. Joe Kraayenbrink from Twin Falls is the Acting Associate Director.

HOT TOPICS: Mr. Taylor said his office is working on the Rangeland Standards and Guides, trying to meet permit renewal deadlines of 2009. Last week his office conducted a "multi-resource meeting," during which all resource specialists received training sessions on improved efficiency, good ID team coordination, and effective monitoring and evaluation. BLM attorneys were also present to help ensure that BLM actions will be NEPA-defensible.

In a follow-up to a question posed at the previous RAC meeting concerning the BLM Table of Organization (TO), Mr. Taylor said that specific information involving personnel could not be discussed, but he did offer that BLM will be looking for ways to increase staff flexibility in order to meet the approximate 5% reduction in the budget. He said the district is "weak on the range side" and that some realignment will occur. The 2005 budget allowed for 111 positions; the 2006 budget allows for 104 approved; 102 positions will be filled by 89 "people in chairs." Some flexibility is maintained by using a lapse in vacancies, contract employees, and/or temporary employees. He will try to

keep a 70% labor to 30% operations ratio. The labor side of the TO includes full-time career positions, term positions up to four years, and seasonal and cooperative positions. The operations side includes temporary and contract labor. By 2008, the target number for permanent employees will be 95, still keeping the 70% to 30% ratio.

Robert Baker asked if BLM could do an adequate job of managing the resource in light of the shrinking budget and continuing litigation. Mr. Taylor replied that BLM will do the best it can with the tools it has. The problem of having to do the required paperwork for litigation is keeping the staff away from the land and the land users more than he would like.

Owyhee Initiative: Mr. Taylor said the group was still progressing and that legislation could be starting any time. Brenda Richards added that the final agreement on wilderness and compensation packages was reached last week and the Owyhee County Commissioners has allowed the agreement to go forward to Senator Crapo. Grant Simonds said the agreement represented the “art of the possible” and that the concept could very well lead to introduced federal legislation. Ms. Richards said there was much interest all over the West because of the number of diverse interest groups that stayed with the Initiative for so long.

Certification of Minutes from the December 14, 2005 Meeting: Margaret Soulen-Hinson recommended that certain references to pressure groups in the minutes were inappropriate and should be changed. Some group members thought that quotations could be taken out of context. Ms. Richards said the group should decide whether it wanted minutes with quotes or just topics. Ms. Soulen-Hinson moved and Ms. Richards seconded to amend the minutes with the suggested changes. The group approved the motion. The changes removed references to Western Watersheds other than that it is the main litigant bringing legal action against BLM. Later in the meeting the group revisited this topic, agreeing that the general format of future minutes should continue as was previously done, so that important subjects or points are not avoided. Disagreements on the content will continue to be brought to the RAC group.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2006:

Chairperson and Vice Chairperson/Secretary: Ms. Soulen-Hinson moved and Mr. Baker seconded that the nominations--Mr. Green for Chairman and Ms. Richards for Vice-Chairman/Secretary--be closed. The group approved the motion, and those two members were duly elected to their respective positions.

Update on RAC Nomination process and those leaving the BD RAC: MJ Byrne gave an update on the RAC nomination process for new members. The process closes on March 27, 2006. Five members’ terms are expiring as of September: Robert Baker (grazing); Robert Amidon, (wild horse and burros); Gilbert Green (utilities and rights of way); Chris Salove, (elected officials); and Richard Raymondi ((public-at-large). Two nominations are required for each position. Mr. Green has agreed to run again, and Mr. Raymondi is still considering. There are also subcommittee vacancies, which can be filled by either RAC members or by other interested persons.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS AND RELATED ISSUE PRESENTATIONS:

Rangeland Standards and Guidelines: Brenda Richards. Ms. Richards and Mitch Jaurena explained what “categorical exclusions” (CE’s) meant in the standards and

guidelines. Permit renewals are allowed for categorical exclusions, which means that “over a period of time, there is no significant effect on the resource.” The exclusions, for example, do not include only grazing; but also fuels reduction, mining, or oil and gas exploration. Mr. Jaurena said that in order of protection of the resource, CE’s ranked third after the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and an Environmental Assessment (EA).

John Robison commented that some CE’s were controversial and some weren’t. He added that the public could misunderstand CE’s, saying that they don’t have a “range of alternatives” and didn’t provide for administrative appeals. Mr. Jaurena said that if the definition of a CE is followed, there will be no adverse effect on the resource, nor will there be a cumulative impact.

Nate Helm said he was interested in the RAC continuing this discussion, streamlining the process and avoiding redundancy. Mr. Taylor said he appreciated these comments, adding that BLM wants to use its authority responsibly, not abuse it.

ACTION: Mr. Taylor will investigate internally ways that BLM can get information out earlier to the public.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS, cont.

Sage Grouse Habitat Management: Richard Raymondi: Mr. Raymondi reported that more work had been done on the statewide conservation plan for sage grouse and turned the presentation over to John Augsburger, BLM Wildlife Biologist. Mr. Augsburger provided a handout of his PowerPoint presentation plus a disk of the full 300+-page plan to RAC members. The plan is titled “Draft 2006 Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho.” The public comment period ends April 21, 2006.

Mr. Augsburger said the writing of the plan was a painful process and that progress was finally made after the group brought in a facilitator. He said the US Fish and Wildlife Service was using the work of local working groups for sage-grouse basically as an experiment to see if a public cooperative approach can be used to manage the species. If this approach does not work, sage grouse will probably be listed as an endangered species. The key agency for Idaho’s plan is the state Fish and Game Department.

Much discussion followed. Most of the questions from the group centered on the following issues: the reliability of scientific data gathered so far which is included in the state plan; the autonomy of already-existing local working groups; how decisions are made on the effectiveness of local working groups; the importance of site-specific data/projects/results for sage grouse; the importance of monitoring and evaluation; and how funding will be found for both the statewide plan and for individual projects. RAC members were encouraged to download the plan for review.

ACTION: Mr. Raymondi will contact all the members of the RAC subcommittee on sage grouse in two weeks to collect and decide upon what goes forward as RAC comments on the plan. He will also collect comments from other interested RAC members. As usual, anyone who wishes to make personal comments on the plan can do so.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: none. (Steve Goddard, member of the RAC subcommittee for sage grouse, participated in the discussion.)

Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) and Transportation Management: Owyhee County OHV Working Group. (This topic was covered during the Owyhee Field Office report later in the meeting.)

River and Recreation Management-Grant Simonds, Chair: Payette River Coordination Meeting, Feb. 28, 2006. Frank Jenks, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, reported on this joint meeting between BLM and the US Forest Service. Each RAC member was provided a handout of the complete minutes of the meeting. There are 11 fee sites with a total of 19 river sites on the Payette. BLM does the design and construction of the sites, while the Forest Service performs day-to-day management of the sites. Much discussion followed on the topics of fee-versus no-fee; strengthening of the Payette River working group; parking congestion; proper use of Forest Service personnel; maintenance of the sites including sanitation, and law enforcement. Other speakers included Mr. TJ Clifford, Forest Service River Manager for the Payette System; Howard Miller, President of the Idaho Whitewater Association; and Kenneth Long, operator of Cascade Raft Company.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Mr. Miller thanked RAC for the opportunity to make comments and said he agreed with the priorities of the coordination meeting PLUS he wants the following: more trash service and receptacles; construction of safer steps at the Banks Parking area; use of river rangers to control parking on weekends; possible paving of a parking area at Beehive Bend; a new takeout at the Kabarton Stretch of the river with a possible purchase of private property.

Mr. Long said the fee use program will have a difficult year in light of the scheduled closures at the Banks parking area since it not only serves at the put-in point for the Main Payette River, but also as the take-out for the South Fork, and Lower South Fork of the Payette.

ACTION: Mr. Helm moved and Mr. Simonds seconded the following motion: that RAC support the recommendations made at the Payette River Coordination Meeting, with the two main priorities being 1) Banks Parking and 2) Beehive Bend. (These priorities are fully described in the Coordination Meeting minutes.) RAC members approved the motion.

ACTION: Mr. Simonds also suggested that Frank Jenks' slide show be copied and made available to RAC members at the next meeting.

ACTION: RAC also suggested that the Payette River Working Group should include a representative from the Idaho Department of Transportation.

WORKING LUNCH: informal discussion on how to make RAC more effective, and ideas for field trips. Ms. Byrne asked RAC members to e-mail her with ideas on both subjects. Some field trip suggestions at this meeting included: 1) Payette River raft trip; 2) Day trip to Banks parking area; 3) Birds of Prey NCA; 4) Project sites of the Owyhee County Sage Grouse Local Working Group; 5) Owyhee River Float Trip; 6) Bruneau-Jarbridge River raft trip; 7) Tennessee Mountain Wind Farm application site; 8) Juniper Mountain; 9) Wilson Creek/Hardtrigger and/or Hemingway Butte route designation areas.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS, CONT.:

Resource Management Plan (RMP)--Gil Green, Chair: Update on Status of Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area RMP.

Mike O'Donnell, BLM Planning & Environmental Coordinator, said the draft was out for print and that he expected no problems. He said there will be a 90-day comment period once the draft is released to the public, and that 30 days into the comment period BLM will begin a series of public meetings that includes a field trip for anyone interested. Approximately 30 days after public comments have been gathered, BLM will respond, produce a final plan, and develop a proposed action via a workshop. Mr. O'Donnell said the "preferred alternative" is basically the direction that BLM wants to take. A quick mention was made concerning the Bruneau RMP. The ACEC's have been done and currently BLM is working on a "range of alternatives."

PUBLIC COMMENTS: none.

DISTRICT FIELD OFFICE AND FIRE MANAGER REPORTS:

Owyhee FO Manager--Ron Kay:

* **Recreation Program.** Mr. Kay reported that the OHV document for the Hemingway Butte area was being finalized and would be made available to the RAC this week. He said the Wilson Creek/Hardtrigger area was the first subunit of route designation for the Owyhee Front and turned over this part of his presentation to Frank Jenks. Mr. Jenks gave a PowerPoint presentation on the route designation process for the Owyhee Front. He said the EA should be out by the end of May and that many presentations have been made to various interest groups. Key comments from these groups have included support for the non-motorized emphasis at Wilson/Hardtrigger; support for the concept of recreational zoning; support for the closure of the existing "play area" there and the resulting proliferation of routes; questions concerning the environmental consequences of route designation; and Owyhee County's concern and plan for dealing with RS 2447 road assertions in the area. He described three kinds of alternatives: 1) no action; 2) resource conservation emphasis, and; 3) recreation emphasis.

* **Realty program.** Mr. Kay provided the RAC members a copy of the Tennessee Mountain Wind Farm application. Some simple testing is being performed and he will keep the RAC apprised of the situation. He then reported on the New Year's Eve flood and resulting washout of the roads to Silver City from both the Owyhee County and Jordan Valley, Oregon sides. As a result, a state of emergency and federal disaster was declared, allowing FEMA to step in. FEMA and Owyhee County will share in the road repair, which is to be performed within the original footprint of the roads. There is no other motorized access to Silver City now other than snowmobile. The last realty issue was the pending sale by BLM of approximately 20 acres that includes the Flint Mine entrances and accompanying buildings to the Bonnell Family which has maintained the site for over 100 years. The EA has been released. The sale includes some deed restrictions regarding maintaining the site for an "historical presence."

* **Fuels Program.** Mr. Kay provided the RAC members with the final copy of the "Juniper Mountain Landscape Restoration Strategy." It is the strategic document called for by those who attended the RAC and BLM co-sponsored Juniper Management Conference held in July 2005. Mr. Taylor said this was a "programmatic scoping document" and does not preclude or bypass public input; it was the result of a land-use plan. Any site-specific prescribed burns or other fuels treatment activities will go through the NEPA procedure. Ranchers have and will be contacted in any prescribed

burn areas to coordinate how they will handle grazing on any affected allotments for the 3-4 year period following the burn.

* **Range Program.** Mr. Kay said seven hearings are scheduled, of which the first was the Flint area allotment. However, Western Watersheds dropped this particular appeal and the hearing was canceled. The draft EA is out for comment on the Shares Basin allotment. Range health assessments directed by Judge Winmill are being contracted out on 42 allotments. The Bruneau and Owyhee Field Offices are sharing this task.

Bruneau FO Manager--Mitch Jaurena: Mr. Jaurena reported that his office is continuing to work with all land users, conservation groups, recreation groups, and Owyhee County Commissioners. He said the Raft River Powerline Project EA is out and that the comment period is completed. There were no challenges, and construction work is scheduled to begin by March 27, 2006. A brochure titled "Owyhee Uplands Back Country Byway" was published with both the BLM and Owyhee County seals. A copy was provided in the RAC meeting notebook. Work has continued with outfitters and guides, sheepherders, and the Sierra Club in planning for hikes and trips into the backlands. He said no one has applied for an outfitter's license at Horse Mountain and BLM would look at any business proposal. Two fire areas in the Northwest allotment were reseeded by hand.

Boise District Office Fire Manager--Andy Delmus: Mr. Delmus reported that there was great snowpack, lots of rain, and lots of grass. He has three large prescribed burns scheduled during late August or early September (weather permitting) and will use crews totaling 110 people.

Four Rivers FO Manager--Rosemary Thomas:

* **Slickspot Peppergrass Update.** Ms. Thomas said that US Fish and Wildlife Service can reconsider the listing of slickspot peppergrass by August of 2006. BLM is a member of a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) along with some non-governmental entities. This agreement is an adaptive management plan and "tweaks" are being made now. She said the big consequence is that the plan means that BLM treats the plant as "endangered" even if it is just proposed as "endangered." BLM will meet with US F&W and write an EA. Then the state Fish and Game Dept. will respond with a Biological Opinion (BO).

***Realty Program.** Ms. Thomas said the Boise Foothills land exchange was shaped by legislation into the "Idaho Enhanced Lands Act." It still has NEPA requirements that need to be addressed. Hopefully, it will receive favorable consideration by both Houses of Congress this session. If it passes and is signed into law, it could increase the amount of public lands in the Boise Foothills. She also said that developers continue to knock at BLM's door and that there was lots of activity going on north of Star and Eagle. BLM is still going by the 1988 Cascade land-use plan and is doing a lot of listening but is not ready to act. **ACTION:** She will bring a map of proposed development affecting BLM lands to the next RAC meeting. The Pickles Butte and Clay Peak land sales are proceeding, as is the Nickelson Land Exchange of 900 acres within the Birds of Prey NCA

***Energy Power Act.** Ms. Thomas provided a handout summarizing the 2005 Energy Power Act passed by Congress. FERC is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The act targets primarily federal lands and makes it easier to acquire them for energy purposes. Mr. Taylor said any BLM lands that might be involved in sales for energy

ACTION: Ms. Byrne will research the number of acres that might be involved and report to RAC. She will also get information from John Sullivan regarding an EA on energy corridors in the Boise to Mountain Home area and make it available as a mailing to RAC members.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS:

The next meeting will be May 16, 2006, at the Community Center in Marsing, Idaho. The fourth meeting is set for September 26, 2006. It will be held at the Boise Foothills Environmental Learning Center. Ms. Byrne will continue to work on assignments for subcommittees of the RAC and would appreciate input from RAC members. The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes prepared by Becky Desmond, Note taker.

Certified by

/S/ 9-8-06
____ date _____
Gilbert Green
RAC Chairman

/S/ 9-11-06
____ date ____
Jerry Taylor
Boise District Manager

Appendix

1. Minutes from Dec. 14, 2005 meeting. Notebook.
2. Idaho Wetlands Work Group invitation. Notebook.
3. Owyhee Uplands Back Country Byway brochure. Notebook.
4. Draft 2006 Conservation Plan for Greater Sage Grouse. Disk in notebook.
5. Letter from Dept. of Fish & Game regarding state sage grouse plan. Notebook.
6. Minutes from Payette River Coordination Meeting. Handout from Frank Jenks.
7. Tennessee Mountain Wind Farm application. Handout from Ron Kay.
8. Juniper Mountain Landscape Restoration Strategy. Handout from Ron Kay.
9. 2005 Energy Power Act. Handout from Rosemary Thomas.